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ABSTRACT

The 100 largest multinational U.S. corporations were surveyed concerning business communication training provided for personnel assigned to overseas posts. The survey requested information on the existence and content of such formal training programs and the qualifications of their training directors. Results drawn from the 43 usable responses suggest that: (1) standardized business communication training materials should be developed and made available to all companies engaging in international business; (2) when program size warrants, full-time overseas training directors should be hired; (3) a clearinghouse for training materials is needed; (4) research identifying the communication skills needed and common communication concerns experienced overseas is desirable; (5) colleges should consider establishing separate international business communication courses; (6) research on the appropriate learning strategies for employees in these programs is needed; (7) college training programs should take an interdisciplinary approach combining business communication, anthropology, and foreign languages; (8) an international business communications model should be developed for better understanding of cultures and their ways of doing business; (9) professional organizations should encourage further business communication research; (10) family members should have access to training programs; and (11) college international communications majors should include international business communication in the core requirements. (MSE)

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THE STATUS OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TRAINING IN THE 100 LARGEST MULTI-NATIONAL UNITED STATES CORPORATIONS

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SEVENTH ANNUAL EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION FOR WORLD BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONS
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THE STATUS OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TRAINING IN THE 100 LARGEST MULTI-NATIONAL UNITED STATES CORPORATIONS

Intense competition, increasingly global markets, and rapid technological changes are problems that will continue to intensify as American business enters the 21st Century. Will America's future executives be prepared to succeed in the approaching international business environment?

In the March 7, 1988, issue of U. S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORTS, the following was stated about future executives:

> If you can tell time in Bonn and know the exchange rate in Seoul, feel at home with spreadsheets and mix well with politicians, the new millennium beckons. But most U. S. managers must retool their thinking to become the 21st Century Executive.

Many American executives seem oblivious to the need for international business experience in their careers. A survey by Korn-Ferry International, as reported in the March 7, 1988, issue of U. S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORTS, showed that time spent overseas was considered to be valuable; however, only .4 percent of the respondents thought it was the fastest way to the top of the corporate ladder.

Rapid technological advances in transportation and electronics have made the concept of a global society a reality in the 20th century. Americans have been purchasing foreign-made goods, and engaging in international business, at an increasing rate each year.

Foreign competition has caused problems as well as provided benefits for American consumers; but foreign manufacturers have helped raise the standard of living for the typical American by providing high-quality goods at reasonable prices.

In order for businesses to maintain a competitive advantage, many domestic firms have found it necessary to locate American workers in foreign environments. The training of these individuals has been a problem, and it has been handled in various ways. Since many Americans are presently being prepared for overseas assignments, in 1987 the writers conducted a study to determine the extent of the training being provided for these individuals.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine answers to the following questions:

1. Do selected firms which conduct a large volume of international business have formal training programs to prepare their employees for overseas assignments?
2. What topics are included in these programs?
3. What are the qualifications of the training directors who are responsible for administering these programs?

Delimitations and Methodology

The study was delimited to the 100 largest multi-national United States corporations, as listed on pp. 186-188 of the July 29, 1985, issue of FORBES magazine. In June, 1987, an opinionnaire (Appendix A) and a cover letter were sent to the training directors of these firms, who were asked to complete and return the instrument within three weeks. In July, 1987, and in August, 1987, follow-up letters were sent to the training directors who did not respond to the original mailing. One hundred opinionnaires were mailed, and 43 usable responses were received.

Presentation of the Findings

According to the respondents to the survey who administered the programs:

1. No specific job title was prevalent.

2. The masters degree was the most-prevalent level of education.

3. No particular undergraduate major was prevalent.

4. No particular graduate major was prevalent.

5. The number of years the respondents had been in their present positions ranged "from one to eight," with eight years being the most-prevalent amount of time.

6. The ages of the training directors ranged between "26-30" and "61-65," with "31-35" and "46-50" being the most-prevalent brackets.

7. Only seven of the 43 respondents' firms had formal programs to train employees for overseas assignments.

8. The length of the training programs varied between "less than one day" to "one week," with "two or three days" being the most-prevalent answer.

9. "Family relocation," "cultural differences," and "cultural sensitivity" were the things which received the greatest emphasis.

10. More top-level and middle-level managers were trained for overseas assignments than any other category.

11. More employees were trained to work in Japan than for any other country.

12. Most of the respondents whose companies had formal training programs developed their own training materials and manuals or used private outside consultants.

13. When training individuals, no one problem was significant.

14. "Language difficulties" and "availability of contact persons" were the items cited as being of most significance to the trainees.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study appear to support the following conclusions:

1. Standardized business communication training materials should be developed and made available to all companies which engage in international business.

2. In those companies where the volume would warrant it, full-time overseas training directors should be appointed.

3. A central network, or clearing house, which include all training materials developed by the 100 largest multi-national United States corporations, should be established. These materials should be made available to all companies.

4. Research is needed to identify clearly the communication skills that are needed in international business communication.

5. Research is needed to determine what skills seem to be common communication concerns of executives who have served in overseas assignments.

6. Universities and colleges should consider establishing separate international business communication courses rather than having them taught as a small unit of a general business communications course.

7. Research is needed to determine what learning strategies are appropriate for employees in international business communications training programs.

8. College and university training programs should include an interdisciplinary approach among business communication, anthropology, and foreign languages.

9. Research is needed to develop an international business communications model that could be the "spring board" for better understanding of various cultures and their ways of doing business.

10. Professional organizations such as the Association for Business Communciation should continue to encourage further research and development of the international business communications area.

11. Training programs should be developed for the family members of of the prospective international employees so they can be acclimated quickly to the new culture.

12. In colleges and universities that have international communications majors, attempts should be made to include the international business communications class as a part of the core requirements.

APPENDIX A

OPINIONNAIRE USED IN THE STUDY

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TRAINING SURVEY

1. Name _____

2. Job title _____

3. Highest education level: (Check one.)

_____ Doctorate
_____ Masters
_____ Bachelors
_____ Two years of college
_____ Less than two years of college

4. College major: (Answer, if applicable.)

_____ Undergraduate

_____ Graduate

5. Name of company: _____

Address: _____

_____
City State Zip Code

6. How many years have you been in your present position? ___

7. Age: (Check one.)

_____ 65 or over
_____ 61-65
_____ 56-60
_____ 51-55
_____ 46-50
_____ 41-45
_____ 36-40
_____ 31-35
_____ 26-30
_____ 21-25

8. Does your company have a formal program to train employees for overseas assignments? _____ Yes _____ No

If you answered "No," you do not need to answer any more questions. Please return this instrument in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. If you answered "yes," please continue to answer the remainder of the questions.

9. Approximately how many Americans does your company have working in other countries?

_____ 0 - 99
_____ 100 - 199
_____ 200 - 299
_____ 300 - 399
_____ 400 - 499
_____ 500 - 599
_____ 600 - 699
_____ 700 - 799
_____ 800 - 899
_____ 1000 or more

10. How long is your training program?

_____ Less than one day
_____ One day
_____ Two-three days
_____ One week
_____ Two weeks
_____ Three weeks
_____ One month
_____ Other (Please specify.)

_____

11. Which of the following items are included in your training program? (You may check more than one.)

_____ Survival skills
_____ Culture differences
_____ Culture sensitivity
_____ Nonverbal communication
_____ Written communication
_____ Social organization
_____ Political environment
_____ Values
_____ Technology
_____ Religion
_____ Education
_____ Family relocation
_____ Language (oral)
_____ Others (Please specify.)

_____

12. What type(s) of individual(s) do you train for overseas assignments? (You may check more than one.)

_____ Top managers
_____ Mid-managers
_____ Supervisory managers
_____ Technical specialists
_____ General workers
_____ Others (Please specify)

_____

13. For which countries do you train workers? (You may check more than one.)

_____Belgium
_____ Brazil
_____ Canada
_____ China
_____ England
_____ France
_____ Germany
_____ Philippines
_____ Hong Kong
_____ India
_____ Japan
_____ Mexico
_____ Poland
_____ Russia
_____ South Africa
_____Other (Please specify countries.)

_____

14. Do you have full-time trainers for international business in your company? _____ Yes _____ No If yes, how many? _____

15. Do you use your own company materials for training?
_____ Yes _____ No

IF YOU ANSWERED "YES" TO NO. 15, ANSWER NO. 16. IF YOU ANSWERED "NO" TO NO. 15, GO ON TO NO. 17.

16. Are these materials available to colleges to use in training programs in international business communications?
_____ Yes _____ No

If so, what is the name of the publication(s) and the approximate cost? _____
Cost _____

Were these training materials developed by your corporation?
_____ Yes _____ No

If you use training materials developed by outside sources, please give the name and addresses for securing copies of these publications.

_____

17. Which of the following resources do you use to train your employees? (You may check more than one.)

_____ Private consultants from various countries
_____ Private outside consultants from the U.S.
_____ Your own training materials and/or manuals
_____ College/university personnel
_____ Materials provided by domestic companies
_____ Materials provided by foreign companies
_____ Materials provided by foreign governments
_____ Materials provided by the U.S. government

18. What do you believe is your biggest problem in preparing employees for overseas assignments?

19. Do you hire outside consultants for training your overseas personnel? _____ Yes _____ No

If so, what training materials are used? _____

_____

Can these be purchased commercially? _____ Yes _____ No

20. What problems do your employees encounter most often when living in a different culture?

SURVIVAL ISSUES

____Climate	____Clothing	____Transportation
____Food and water	____Housing	____Money
____Language	____Availability of contact persons	

SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM
____Satisfactory relationships

CONTACT WITH OTHER AMERICAN WORKERS
____Does not learn from the experience of previous American workers

HEALTH PROBLEMS
____Fear of illness ____Actual illness

OUTLETS FOR PERSONAL INTERESTS
____Intellectual ____Recreational

LANGUAGE ABILITY
____Communication with citizens of the host country

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